

How to Use “The Elephant in the Room”

As with all children’s picture books, the colorful illustrations provide additional avenues for discussion and building vocabulary; ‘fleshing out’ language by talking about what the characters are doing, how they might be feeling, and what is going on in the situation that may be prompting their reactions. With that in mind, I have included some specific discussion questions that could be offered after each page has been read. Keep in mind the Elephant has his own story line, and his thoughts and motivation can be addressed separately.

“Buzz Buzz. Flash Flash.” – Skyler’s reading lamp is hooked up to the alarm clock and flashes on and off in tandem with the alarm. Discuss why the light is helpful as an accommodation. The dog barks at the alarm. Discuss the notion of ‘hearing ear dogs’ and how they can function as an assistant when sounds occur. Where does he keep his hearing aids while he sleeps? Is this a good choice? Why?

“Ugh I don’t feel like talking....” – Why not? How is Mom’s distant indistinct comment affecting him? Why is the Elephant saying “He’s gonna need those?” Discuss the importance of using hearing aids all waking hours.

“Because it’s TOO hard to listen.” Why would that be? Is listening hard work for you sometimes? When? Discuss how Skyler might be negative or frustrated. Suggest to the children that they will find the answer in the following pages.

“All he could hear was the TV” – There is a lot going on here. Point out that each boy is doing his own thing. Joe’s comment is lost on Skyler. Why? How many things is Joe doing at once? What could Joe have done to get his message across? (Turned the volume down and looked at him so he could speechread.)

“Skyler missed it” – Another missed opportunity to communicate. What did Joe forget to do? Why did Skyler think he said “Shirt”? (Consonant sounds are easy to mishear) The boys seem to accept this confusion without stopping each other. Why? Do we ‘let things go by’ like this in our lives? Why or why not?

“GOOD MORNING!” she sang. Skyler JUMPED! – How’s Sally feeling today?! How is Skyler feeling? Why would Skyler jump? What could she do to make him feel better?

“I DON’T feel like talking.” – Why doesn’t Skyler feel like talking? It’s good to be cheerful, but is Sally being thoughtful? What could she do to help?

“GOOD Morning, son.” - Why does the elephant think this is a good start? What are Dad and Skyler doing that helps communication?

“I’m STINKY and your socks are too TIGHT.” – Did Dad really say that?! Why is Skyler confused? What’s Dad doing/not doing that might make it hard for Skyler to understand him correctly? Are your socks stinky?

“That’s ALL RIGHT SKY. Don’t you WORRY about it.” – What Dad said SOUNDED like he was talking about stinky socks! Now that makes sense so Sky is now relieved. Dad wants him to feel ok about misunderstanding so he says “Don’t you worry about it.” But Skyler still sighs.....Why? The elephant knows. What else could Dad have done or said?

“Skyler didn’t feel much like EXPLAINING either.” - Moms are always concerned about us. She asked why he didn’t answer her when she called up from downstairs. Do you know why? What does the elephant say? Can you think of an additional purpose for his BIG flappy ears? (to cool his body off) Why do you suppose Skyler doesn’t feel like explaining about talking from another room? Do people do that to you?

“OH, sure you do. Sally would LOVE to TALK to YOU.” – Skyler said he doesn’t feel much like talking. But mom says “Oh sure you do!” She wants to cheer him up. Does that help? Why or why not?

“WHOA! STOP! You’re both talking at ONCE!” – Why is Skyler yelling and upset? Has this situation happened to you? Why is that a problem? Does the elephant have a good idea?

“Oh NEVER MIND, it doesn’t matter.” - What is Sally doing this time that makes it seem like she is saying one very, very long word? What could she do to help Skyler understand better? What is he elephant thinking? When you don’t understand something and someone tells you to “Never mind”, does it bother you? Why?

“And for the FIRST TIME that morning, Skyler smiled.” – Why do you think Skyler is smiling?! What is Maizy doing that helps him to understand her?

“Get close, speak clearly, and be FACE TO FACE when we talk.” - Mom is remembering these 3 simple steps for better communication. There are 3 more rules that we saw earlier in the book. Can you think of them? (Turn off background noise. Speak one at a time. Don’t talk from another room. Get close to the person.) And what’s up with Dad – what could *he* do to better understand Mom when she speaks so softly? Do elephants really like peanuts?

*The author would love to hear questions or comments. Find him at www.jimbobicino.com.